

COMMUTERS OF MISSOULA

WALKING WITH SIERRA

My name is Sierra and I live in the lower Rattlesnake, but I feel like it's more like mid-snake... it's the very upper part of the lower Rattlesnake. I work at Ecology Project International (EPI), which is on the east side of 4th Street just off the Milwaukee Trail. **With my dog, Waffles, it takes us about 40 minutes to walk to work. It's 1.2 miles.**

I've been sustainably commuting in Missoula for eight years, but I started pretty much exclusively walking once I got Waffles. She really was the motivation. Waffles comes to work with me every day. EPI deserves a huge shout out. There is such a welcoming atmosphere to animals. **Allowing pets in the office is the reason I'm able to commute the way that I do. I don't have to walk home on my lunch break to take care of Waffles. She loves coming into work and she loves the walks!**

I imagine how grumpy and chaotic I would be if I showed up to work having driven versus spending 35 minutes walking on a quiet street in the rattlesnake. I hate driving. Like, I really, really hate relying on a vehicle for so many reasons... It's expensive. It's inefficient. It's bad for the environment. Parking is a pain. It doesn't bring me any joy! **But walking is just such an enjoyable way to start the day; getting some exercise, getting outside, listening to music, listening to a podcast and carving out that very intentional time to get from point A to point B.**

I think people think walking takes forever; that it's exhausting or inconvenient. A lot of times when I tell people I walk to work from the Rattlesnake, their eyes get wide and they're like, 'Oh, wow! That's a journey!' But... it's really not! The reality is, it's slow, mellow, almost like a meditative state. It maybe adds an extra 20 minutes to my commute... but it's a delightful 20 minutes!

I really see walking as a form of self-care. I'm getting exercise, I'm getting fresh air, I am catching up on podcasts. I'm listening to my Spotify Discovery Weekly, new music. I call my parents or my sister during my commute. Most of the time it's just me and Waffles, but some days I'll walk with my partner when

our timing works out. I look forward to the sunrises in the morning and the sunsets in the evening. The skies that I've seen because I take the time to walk is not something I take for granted...and oh my goodness! the number of Great Blue Heron sightings I would have missed without walking! In the summertime, I get to dunk in the river or in the Rattlesnake Creek on the way home with my dog and it's such a nice way to end the day. It's really valuable time that you can use in a very recharging way.

If you are going to start a walking commute, my advice would be to get the right gear - warm winter boots, yak tracks, warm clothing, hats and gloves. I dress my dog in booties and a jacket, too. In the summertime, I like to work in my Birkenstocks. Even though they're comfy, they're not great for walking long distances. So I'll wear my tennis shoes and then I'll change into my Birkenstocks when I get to the office. You got to be comfy. I'll plan accordingly with different backpacks. I have a day bag that can fit my laptop, my notebook, my lunch, my coffee mug, my water bottle, Waffle's snacks, and all the things that I need. But if I need to carry extra supplies or something, I can bring my backpacking backpack, which has a lot of hip and shoulder support. And bring water and snacks and layers. I always have a green

jacket at the bottom of my backpack. It's a good, good layer. Having the right gear makes walking to work a safe and comfortable experience.

I would encourage anyone checking out Missoula In Motion's website and reading the commuter stories to really think about what your commute would look like if you tried to use your vehicle less. I acknowledge that it's not possible for everyone, but you can get really creative with your commute! Look at your schedule and your routine and your habits and consider what it would look like to try walking or biking or riding the bus. It's like a little community, you know? I see the same people usually in the mornings and I feel like there's kind of this unspoken respect and admiration among everyone.

I love everything about my commute. It is a highlight of my day almost every day. My life would look and feel really, really different if I didn't have my morning and evening walks. You don't need to hike big mountains to experience outdoor exploration, exercise, and adventure. It can be a part of your daily schedule if you want it to be. There's no doubt, I feel super lucky and privileged that I'm able to commute the way that I do.
